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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004582

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SUBJECT: IRAQI PRESIDENT TELLS CODEL MCCAIN NEW TACTICS,
MORE WEAPONS NEEDED

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Iraqi President Talabani declared to a congressional delegation led by Senator John McCain (R-AZ) December 13 that new tactics and more weapons are crucial elements to stabilizing Iraq. He said the American people need to understand the positive consequences of deposing Saddam Hussein as well as the negative things currently occurring, and added that Iran and Syria have pledged to stop terrorists from coming into Iraq across their borders. Commanding General of Iraq's Armed Forces General Zebari explained that local loyalties hindered security progress. He asserted that given additional resources and leeway to do his job, the Minister of Interior could be more effective. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Accompanying Senator McCain were Senators Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), Susan Collins (R-ME), Lindsay Graham (R-SC), and Congressman Mark Kirk (R-IL). Ambassador Khalilzad also attended the dinner. Iraqis included President Jalal Talabani, Minister of Defense (MoD) Abdul Qader al-Mufraji, Minister of Water and Resources Laith Rashid, General Babakir Zebari, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masoud Barzani, and KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani.

More Weapons, New Tactics, Potentially More Troops

¶3. (C) Talabani said the Iraqi Army and the police forces are many in number but low in quality and called for cooperation and coordination with U.S. forces. He repeatedly called for more and better weapons to form new units and arm old ones. He and others related several stories about units without enough weapons and ammunition or those that have been forced to re-supply from the Kurdish Region rather than the GOI. He said securing Baghdad is the key to securing the rest of the country and discussed the moderate front that has been taking shape over the past several weeks. Masoud Barzani said the solution to the security problem is to establish a coalition of moderates that support the government and then go after the terrorists and the Sadrists Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia.

¶4. (C) Asked how to secure Baghdad, both Talabani and al-Mufraji said the Army needs to change its tactics and reach out to the citizens. Talabani said that in the past, citizens of areas plagued by terrorism were not willing to cooperate with security forces, but now there are signs that Iraqis are ready to fight terror in some areas, notably in Al Anbar. Talabani said securing Iraq requires a comprehensive plan that begins with giving Prime Minister Maliki freedom to control the security forces directly in order to deal with immediate crises such as terrorist attacks.

¶5. (C) Asked about U.S. troop levels, al-Mufraji said that

he, CG Casey and others had prepared a plan for stabilizing Iraq that would be ready next Friday (Note: It was unclear if this meant December 15 or 22). At that time he would have a better estimate of how many more troops he could use. Both Talabani and the al-Mufraji said Iraqi forces should take the lead in any operation but be backed up by US forces. Talabani said Iraqi-led operations in Sadr City are more likely to be seen as legitimate because JAM members that resist will be seen as criminals rather than fighters against the occupation. Al-Mufraji admitted that Sadr City would not be the first target of a new strategy for securing Baghdad.

Positives, Pledges

¶16. (C) Talabani told the delegation that the American people need to understand the positive consequences of deposing Saddam Hussein as well as the negative things currently occurring. He said that Iraq has held free elections, drafted and ratified a constitution, and given minorities full rights for the first time in Iraq's history. He also noted that the Kurdish Region was an example of prosperity the rest of Iraq could follow and pointed to the upcoming political parties' conference on December 16 as a step in the right direction.

¶17. (C) Talabani told the CODEL the main problem in Iraq is international terrorism coming from Iran and Syria, but, he said, both of these countries have pledged to stop it. He said the GOI sent two delegations to Syria, including former Prime Minister Jafari, to assess Syrian sincerity.

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Local Ties hurt Progress of Iraqi Police

¶18. (C) Senator Thune told Talabani that the American people are frustrated with the pace of progress in Iraq. General Zebari explained to the CODEL that problems with the Iraqi police arise due to the way they are recruited: local police are recruited locally and thus have loyalties and ties to the local populous, whereas the Iraqi Army recruits at national recruiting centers and the units do not necessarily return to where they were recruited. In the provinces the police are controlled by the Governor and Provincial Council, but they lack money and weapons. Zebari said MOI forces (which include the national police, a border patrol, and a Facilities Protection Force) lack good command and control, but if given the resources and leeway to do his job, the Minister of Interior could succeed.
KHALILZAD